Solve It Yourself

Magic Word Mysteries

Carol Beach York

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Written by Carol Beach York
Illustrated by John Lawn

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Contents

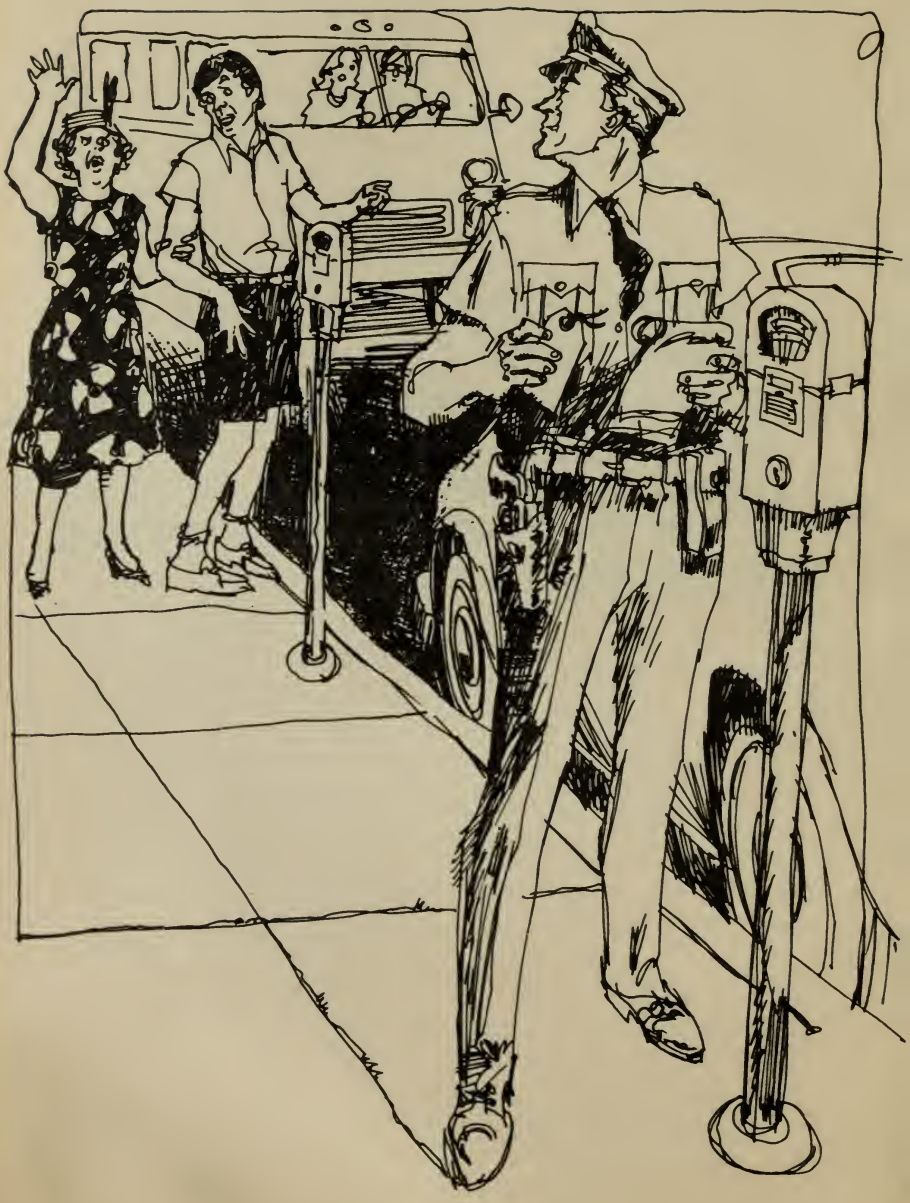
Introduction	vii
Arrest This Man!	1
The Haunted House	7
At Gunpoint	14
A Voice from the Dead	23
The Perfect Murder	36
The Magic Word	47
Answers	53

A single word can be very important.

Just one word.

The solution to each of these stories can be found in just one word.

Read the stories carefully. See if you can find the "magic word" in each story that will solve the mystery!



Arrest This Man!

Officer Barnett was writing parking tickets on Main Street one summer afternoon. Saturday shoppers had a bad habit of overstaying their time on the meters.

Davis Hardware was having a sale; music blared from the loudspeaker at Melody Record Store; the ice-cream shop was crowded. It was a typical Saturday afternoon along Main Street. Officer Barnett did not expect to hear someone suddenly cry—

"*Officer, arrest this man!*"

Barnett looked up from a parking ticket. A few yards away stood an elderly lady. She was clutching the arm of a tall, dark-haired man casually dressed in shorts and a short-sleeved summer shirt. The woman looked excited. The young man looked surprised and confused.

"*Officer—Officer!*" the woman called again. A few people had already begun to gather around her.

It's going to be one of those days, Barnett

thought to himself. He closed up his ticket book and stepped over to the curb.

"What seems to be the problem here?"

The young man spread his hands in a gesture of innocence. "There's been a mistake," he pleaded.

"There's no mistake," the gray-haired lady declared. "This man cheated me."

"Lady, I don't even know you," the young man said helplessly.

"Okay, okay." Officer Barnett held up his hand. "Just stay calm, everybody."

More people began to gather. This was more interesting than the lawn-mower sale at Davis Hardware.

"I won't calm down," the woman insisted. Her face was pink and warm. Even her hat seemed to tremble with indignation. "This man cheated me out of fifty dollars. Arrest him!"

Officer Barnett wished he was a hundred miles away. It was a sweltering day, and writing parking tickets wasn't his favorite hot-afternoon job. But this wasn't much better.

"Now, Ma'am," Barnett tried to sound soothing, "if you'll just tell me what this is all about—"

"I'll tell you," she interrupted quickly. "This man came to my house a few weeks ago. I was sitting on my front porch, and this man drove up.

He said he noticed my house needed painting."

Officer Barnett stared blankly.

"Painting," the woman repeated. "He said he could see that the paint was peeling in places. Well, it is." She paused and cast an apologetic glance at the curious crowd standing around her. "It *is* peeling. But it's so expensive to have a whole house painted."

Several people in the crowd nodded.

"Costs a fortune," one man called out.

The elderly lady nodded with satisfaction and continued her story. "I told him I couldn't afford to have my house painted right now. You know how it is—"

There were sympathetic nods from the onlookers.

Officer Barnett took off his cap and wiped his forehead. He thought this had to be the hottest day of the whole summer.

"I don't quite understand what you're getting at, Ma'am."

"My front porch." Her eyes blazed at Officer Barnett as though he should certainly know what she was getting at. "My front porch. I told this young man I couldn't afford to have the whole house painted, but maybe I could afford to have the porch painted. He said he would do it for one hundred and fifty dollars."

"Lady, you've got the wrong man." The young man appealed to the growing crowd. He appealed to Officer Barnett. "I never saw this lady before in my life."

"You never saw me before in your life?" The old woman quivered with rage. "And I suppose you never saw my fifty dollars either."

There was some murmuring in the crowd.

"Now just everybody stay calm," Officer Barnett said a second time. He turned to the lady. "What fifty dollars?"

"He wanted a fifty-dollar deposit. He said he would be back the next day to paint the porch, but he never came—and I never saw my fifty dollars again." The lady was still clutching the young man's arm, and she gave it a furious shake. "This man is a crook, a swindler. Arrest him!"

Officer Barnett looked at the young man.

"What have you got to say for yourself? Did you tell this woman you would paint her porch for a hundred and fifty dollars?"

The young man gestured helplessly. "That's a fair price for a small porch—but it wasn't me. Honest, Officer. I never saw this lady before in my life. And I don't paint houses."

"What do you do?" Officer Barnett looked more carefully at the young man.

"I'm a car salesman," the young man said.

The mention of cars reminded Barnett of the

parking tickets he was supposed to be writing. He felt weary.

"I never thought I'd find him," the old lady said eagerly. "But I remembered his blue car—he parked in front of my house that day. And I saw it here."

She motioned toward the cars parked along the street.

There was a blue one nearby. But the town was full of blue cars.

"When I saw the car, I knew he was somewhere in the stores. I waited, and by and by he came out of the drugstore and I caught him." The woman's face was triumphant.

By now a rather large crowd had gathered. The sidewalk was full of people.

Officer Barnett eased his cap back on his head. He didn't have to hear any more. He knew the woman had the right man.

How did Officer Barnett know that this was the man who had swindled the woman by promising to paint her porch and collecting fifty dollars in advance for a job he never did?

The solution is on page 53.

The Haunted House

Winter afternoons are short. By four thirty, dusk begins to gather. By five o'clock, it is dark.

Francie Evans hurried along Damen Street, her library books in her arms. She had stayed too long at the library, and she didn't like to be walking home in the gathering darkness. Especially the gathering darkness on Damen Street. There, her way led past the Haunted House.

But it was already nearly five o'clock, and she was supposed to be home by four thirty. Damen Street was the quickest way home.

Francie and her sister Jill had named the house on Damen Street the "Haunted House." It was an old frame house with gabled upper rooms. Lights at the windows always seemed dim. Francie and Jill never saw anyone going in or coming out of the house.

"Maybe no one really lives there," Jill had whispered one day.

And so they named it the "Haunted House."

It looked like a place where ghosts might live.

In the summer, it was shadowed by trees. Dark, mysterious. In winter, bare bony tree branches made the house look even more spooky.

Low bushes bordered the snow-covered yard. The snow glimmered in the fading light...there now, she was almost safely past.

Then she heard a soft moaning sound behind her.

Francie held her library books closer and glanced over her shoulder. There was no one in sight. The shoveled sidewalk was deserted all the way back to the end of the block.

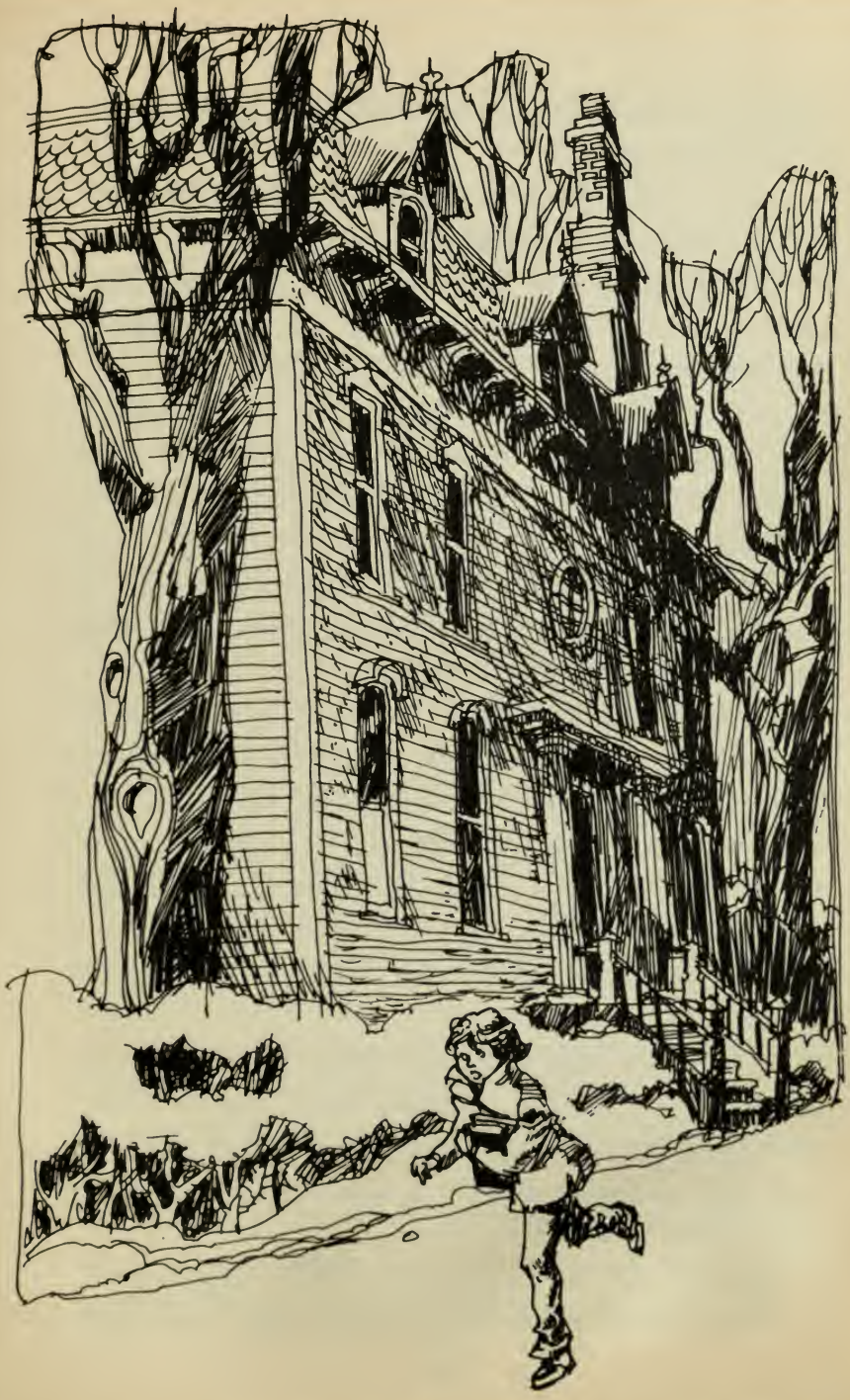
Close by, in the cold darkness, came the sound of low, wicked laughter. Close to Francie. Close enough to touch.

Francie's heart thumped wildly, and she began to run. Behind her, from the Haunted House, someone, something, screamed:

"Run! Run!"

She almost dropped her library books. She slipped and nearly fell on a patch of ice. But she *ran.* The street was silent now, but Francie could still hear the echo of the awful laughter and the screaming voice: *"Run! Run!"*

She was breathless when she reached the corner and turned down Winfield Street, where her own house was. Her sister Jill was just going up the front walk of the house as Francie came flying along. Jill had been at a friend's house—and she



was late, too. Both girls were supposed to be home by four thirty.

"Run, run," Francie gasped, catching up with Jill at the bottom of the porch steps.

Jill thought they were running because they were late, and she pounded up the porch steps behind Francie.

Mrs. Evans was in the kitchen peeling potatoes for dinner. The house was bright and cozy and warm. The kitchen was filled with the good smell of supper.

Mrs. Evans greeted the girls and was about to give a lecture about being home on time, when she saw Francie's frightened face.

"The Haunted House—" Francie tried to catch her breath. "A voice laughed and then screamed *'Run! Run!'*—and there was no one there—"

Mrs. Evans calmed Francie enough to finally get the whole story. Jill stood wide-eyed, listening to what Francie said.

"It *is* haunted," Jill wailed. "Oh, Mom, it really *is* haunted."

"Let's not get excited." Mrs. Evans patted Jill's arm. Jill was younger than Francie. She looked even more frightened than Francie did. "It was just someone playing a joke on Francie—and not a very nice joke."

Mrs. Evans shook her head with disapproval.

"Let this be a lesson to both of you. You were

both supposed to be home half an hour ago, while it was still light outside. I don't know why you girls can't keep better track of the time."

"I had homework, Mom," Francie pleaded. She was still holding the library books in arms stiff with fright.

"And what's your excuse, Jill?" Mrs. Evans always found it hard to be cross with Jill. Jill always looked so sorrowful when she was scolded.

Before Jill could say she was having so much fun playing at her friend's house that she forgot the time, the girls' older brother Bob came up the back-porch steps stamping snow from his boots. He opened the kitchen door with his usual greeting:

"I'm starved!"

Bob always said this while he pressed a hand to his stomach and pretended to stagger a little. A famished man, fainting from hunger.

"Hey, what's going on?" Bob saw his sisters gazing at him with frightened faces. He saw his mother's stern look.

Francie had caught her breath by now, but it was Jill who burst out with the story.

"A voice—at the Haunted House. It said *'Run! Run!'*"

"Ah, the Haunted House." Bob pushed back his cap and grinned. He was always teasing his sisters about their haunted house. He said if

ghosts lived there, they were the only ghosts he knew who had a car in the driveway.

"After this, I want you girls here by four thirty and not one minute later." Mrs. Evans shook a warning finger.

"No one was there—just a voice." Jill had hardly heard her mother. She wanted Bob to know he was wrong. It *was* a haunted house.

"Aw, come on." Bob tugged at Jill's long hair playfully.

"It really is haunted," Jill insisted.

Bob laughed. "You know what I think, Jill? I think she made the whole thing up."

"I did not!" Francie protested. "I didn't make it up at all. There was a funny sound, and then a horrible sort of laugh. And then someone shouted *'Run! Run!'*"

She turned to her mother desperately. "I didn't make it up. I didn't make it up."

Mrs. Evans patted Francie's shoulder. "I know you didn't make it up. It was someone playing a bad joke."

Then Mrs. Evans turned to Bob.

"Shame on you, Bob," she said sternly. "That wasn't very nice, scaring your sister."

How did Mrs. Evans know Bob was the one who had played the joke on Francie?

The solution is on page 53.

At Gunpoint

There had been a light rain earlier in the afternoon, but now the sky was clearing over the city. It was going to be a beautiful spring evening.

The Fairchild Jewelry Store closed as usual at five thirty. The display cases were locked. The most valuable gems were taken to the safe in the office for the night.

Mr. Fairchild had left at five o'clock, so it was Mr. Purdy's job to close up the store.

Mr. Purdy sat in the office sorting some papers on his desk. Even when the other employees had left he would probably linger. His life was lonely. He had no reason to rush home. At his apartment, only the ticking of the clock or a voice from the television set would keep him company.

Mr. Purdy's face had grown long and thin during his years of living alone. His job at the Fairchild Jewelry Store was the most important thing in his life, and Mr. Fairchild was fortunate to have such a trustworthy employee. Mr. Fairchild was able to leave early if he chose and know that

everything would be well taken care of by Mr. Purdy.

Mr. Purdy closed a folder of papers and looked at his watch.

It was nearly six o'clock. Time to leave.

Outside, rush-hour buses thronged the streets. What would he have for dinner? Was there something suitable in the refrigerator—or should he stop at the store on his way home?

"Mr. Purdy."

Joe Ferret stood in the office doorway. He was a new salesman at the store—he'd been there about six months.

"Yes, what is it?" Mr. Purdy was roused from his thoughts of dinner.

Joe Ferret came into the office and closed the door behind him. He took a gun from his pocket and pointed it at Mr. Purdy.

Mr. Purdy stared with astonishment. His heartbeat quickened. He had never before had a gun aimed at him.

"Everyone's gone," Joe Ferret said. Mr. Purdy could hope for no help.

Mr. Purdy looked at Ferret in bewilderment. The young man had always seemed nice enough. But there was nothing nice about him now. His face was cold and grim.

"Open the safe, Mr. Purdy—quick now, I'm not fooling around."

Mr. Purdy's heart was pounding now. He could not really believe someone was pointing a gun at him.

"Open the safe." Joe Ferret ground out the words between clenched teeth.

"Joe—what are you doing?" Mr. Purdy's voice faltered.

Ferret laughed softly. "It's a stick-up, Mr. Purdy. You know what that is, don't you? Now open the safe."

"I can't open the safe," Mr. Purdy stammered. "Mr. Fairchild is the only one who can open the safe."

Joe Ferret's eyes narrowed. "What are you trying to get away with? Mr. Fairchild leaves early sometimes, and you come back here and put things in the safe for the night."

"Mr. Fairchild leaves the safe open for me," Mr. Purdy tried to explain. "He's the only one who knows the combination. I just put in the jewels and close the safe."

Ferret was silent for a moment.

"You're lying." Joe Ferret jerked the gun closer to Mr. Purdy. Mr. Purdy's heart sank. He was alone with a man with a gun—and a safe full of valuable jewels.

And what he had said was true. He couldn't open the safe.

"I can't open the safe," he repeated. His thin face was pale. "Only Mr. Fairchild can open the safe."

"Then get him here." Ferret's demand was quick and harsh.

"He's gone." Mr. Purdy shook his head helplessly. "You know he left early today."

"Get him back."

With his free hand, Joe Ferret lifted the telephone receiver on Mr. Purdy's desk. His other hand kept the gun aimed steadily at Mr. Purdy.

"Call him. Tell him to get back here."

"What reason can I give him?" Mr. Purdy asked uncertainly.

"Tell him you accidentally closed the safe before everything was in."

Mr. Purdy stared at the telephone receiver. He stared at the gun. He had no choice.

He dialed Mr. Fairchild's home number, silently praying that it would not be too late, that Mr. Fairchild would still be at home. Mr. Fairchild was going to a dinner party with his wife, and then to the concert hall for a violin recital—his favorite kind of music. He had left the store an hour ago. He could easily have reached home, dressed for the evening, and left.

"Act natural," Joe Ferret warned. He held the gun closer to Mr. Purdy's stricken face.

On the other end of the line the phone rang.

Brrrr

Brrrr

Brrrr

Purdy listened with dismay. No one was answering. Mr. Fairchild and his wife had already left for the dinner party. They would go from dinner to the concert hall. There was no way he could reach them.

Brrrr

Brrrr

Just as Mr. Purdy gave up hope, the receiver lifted at the other end of the line.

"Hello."

It was Mrs. Fairchild. Her voice came sweetly and happily to Mr. Purdy. She didn't know she was talking to someone with a gun pointed at his head.

"Umm—" Mr. Purdy cleared his throat. He was surprised to find that his throat was completely dry. He could hardly speak.

"Is Mr. Fairchild there?"

"Oh, you're in luck." Mrs. Fairchild laughed lightly. "We were just going out the door—wait, I'll get him."

Mr. Purdy glanced up at Ferret. The gun barrel glistened in the light from the desk lamp.

"She's getting him," Mr. Purdy whispered. The words came like a croak from his dry throat. "Oh,

hello, Mr. Fairchild—sorry to disturb you—"

Joe Ferret leaned closer, the gun pointed like a death warning at Mr. Purdy. "Act natural."

Act natural! Mr. Purdy was surprised that he could speak at all, but he heard the words coming, heard his own voice saying, "Yes, I'm sorry to bother you—guess I was lucky to catch you before you left." He made an attempt to sound casual. "I know you've got a big evening, dinner and the concert—Chopin, isn't it? I wish I was going. Well, umm—something's come up here—" Mr. Purdy floundered for words.

Joe Ferret glared. His face was menacing.

Mr. Purdy tried to sound apologetic. "I've accidentally locked the safe and left out a necklace. I thought you'd want to come by and take care of it...yes, that will be fine. Sorry to bother you."

Mr. Purdy hung up the phone. His hands were trembling. Sweat broke out in little beads across his forehead.

"Well?" Joe Ferret asked impatiently.

"He's coming right over." Mr. Purdy slumped back in his chair.

They watched the clock. Mr. Purdy sat like a stone statue at his desk, afraid to move. Joe Ferret stood across the desk, holding the gun.

"How long will it take him?"

"Ten minutes—maybe longer, traffic is heavy this time of night," Mr. Purdy whispered. It was

amazing to think that in the streets outside, so very close, there were throngs of people and buses and cars. Everybody going about their business, while Mr. Purdy sat at gunpoint.

Ten minutes passed.

Fifteen minutes.

It was nearly twenty-five minutes before they heard the sound of footsteps in the outer hallway.

Mr. Fairchild had let himself in the back door with his key. In a moment he opened the office door and stood there in his fine evening clothes gazing at Mr. Purdy. And Joe Ferret. And the gun.

He did not have to ask any questions. He could see at once what was going on. When Joe Ferret motioned his gun toward the small safe in the

corner, Mr. Fairchild went to it without a word.

Mr. Purdy watched silently as Mr. Fairchild turned the dial on the safe door.

The door swung open. Inside were the slim, velvet-lined boxes containing necklaces and rings set with diamonds. A fortune in jewels.

Joe Ferret looked at the open safe greedily. His back was to the office door when the two police officers entered and came up behind him.

His robbery had failed.

Who had notified the police that a robbery was underway?

The solution is on page 53.

A Voice from the Dead

It was nearing dark when Joan Marshall got off the train at Elmville. The train had been cool, but as Joan came down the train steps she could feel the warm summer evening all around her. There would be fireflies in dusky gardens, people chatting on front porches after supper, children called home to take baths and get ready for bed.

Joan could feel all of these things as she came down the train steps.

She had lived in Elmville when she was a girl, and she came back every summer to spend a week with her cousin, Emily.

And there was Emily on the platform, plump and gray-haired, hurrying through the dusk to greet Joan with a kiss and a hug.

It was only a few minutes' drive from the train station to Emily's house. Usually Joan spent the ride turning her head every way at once to see the dear old streets and houses she loved so much. So many years had passed, yet Elmville stayed the same. She found that comforting.

But this time Joan didn't have a chance to look at her home town as they drove to Cousin Emily's house. They were hardly in the car when Emily said, "I have so much to tell you! I hardly know where to begin."

Joan laughed. "Begin at the beginning," she suggested.

But Cousin Emily jumped right into her story at the middle.

"I've talked with Mother," she said excitedly. "I've talked with Mother, Joan."

Joan Marshall blinked with surprise. It was no wonder she didn't think to look around at the familiar streets of Elmville.

Emily's mother had been dead for many years.

When Joan had freshened up from her train trip, she sat with Emily and Emily's husband James in the quiet living room of their rambling old house.

Then, at last, Joan heard the story from the beginning.

By now it was completely dark outside, and Cousin Emily had turned on the lamps. Joan sat in her favorite chair, a rocker with a soft blue cushion. They drank ice tea while Emily told her story. All the way through her story, James kept interrupting to say it was all foolishness, and he didn't approve of it for one minute.

The story—beginning at the beginning—was

that Emily had gone to a séance one afternoon about a month before. She had gone with her friend Mrs. Bemis.

It was Mrs. Bemis who had found out about the séance.

Emily and Mrs. Bemis had driven to a small house on the outskirts of town, the home of Mrs. Corini. And that was where the séance was.

"It's all nonsense, pure fake." Cousin James rattled the ice in his tea glass and shook his head, which was now almost bald. He had a good mustache, but not much hair on the top of his head.

"You just be quiet and let me tell Joan." Emily shook her finger at her husband.

"Tell, tell. It's all foolishness," Cousin James insisted.

At the séance, everyone held hands around a table, and Mrs. Corini had called back Mrs. Bemis's husband from the dead. At least, she had called back his voice.

I love you, Catherine, the voice had said to Mrs. Bemis.

"And I love you, Jonathan." Mrs. Bemis's voice shook with joy to hear her beloved husband speaking to her.

All around the table in the darkened room the people had sat holding hands and listening to the voice from the dead.

"A fake! A fake!" James interrupted, shaking his head.

Joan thought James was perfectly right. But she didn't say anything. She sipped her tea and waited to hear the rest of Cousin Emily's story.

After that first afternoon, Emily had gone back to Mrs. Corini's house several times. At last, she asked Mrs. Corini if she could speak to her dead mother.

"And Mother spoke to me," Cousin Emily concluded in a hushed tone. "She really did, Joan. It was wonderful. I've missed her all these years, and it was good to hear her voice again."

"That Mrs. Corini is a fake, Emily, and you know it," her husband said. He set down his glass with a thump.

"I don't know any such thing," Cousin Emily answered crossly.

"She's taking money under false pretenses," James said. "People don't come back from the dead to talk to us."

"Sometimes they do," Emily insisted.

Cousin Emily and Cousin James went on arguing. Joan could tell they had argued about Mrs. Corini before. More than once! Finally, James threw up his hands.

"I give up."

He turned to Joan.

"I've talked myself hoarse, but Emily just won't listen."

Joan didn't like to be in the middle of an argument. She was a gentle woman. She liked to raise African violets and bake pecan pies. Arguments made her nervous. Besides that, she didn't want to take sides. She loved Emily very much, but she was sure that James was right. She was sure that Mrs. Corini was a fake.

"I've invited James to come and see for himself," Emily said next. "But he's too stubborn."

"Too smart, would be more like it," James snapped back.

"Please don't fight about it," Joan said unhappily.

"Don't you think it was wonderful that Mother talked to me?" Cousin Emily turned to her hopefully.

"Well..." Joan paused and tried to think what she should say. She couldn't think of anything.

"You don't believe in Mrs. Corini either." Cousin Emily was disappointed.

No, Joan certainly didn't believe. But she could see that arguing about it wouldn't change Cousin Emily's mind.

"No, Emily," she said at last, "I really don't believe in voices from the dead. But I'm willing to go and see for myself."

"I'm disappointed in you," James declared. But Joan smiled to herself. She thought when her visit to Mrs. Corini was over, James would be glad she had gone.

"I'll call Mrs. Corini first thing tomorrow morning and make an appointment," Cousin Emily said eagerly. She patted Joan's hand. "Who do you want to talk to?"

"I think I would like to talk to my sister," Joan said. "Can Mrs. Corini contact children? You know my sister was only twelve."

"I'll ask her," Cousin Emily promised.

James threw up his hands and refused to say anything more. Which was all right with Joan. The arguing was over.

When Joan Marshall went to bed, the moon was shining in the warm summer sky. Crickets were chirping in the grass. Everything was very peaceful, just the way she remembered and loved the little town of Elmville.

But she thought she would enjoy her visit with Emily more once the matter of Mrs. Corini was taken care of.

Mrs. Corini's house was small and rather shabby looking. The grass needed mowing, Joan noted. No doubt Mrs. Corini was too busy calling back the dead to worry about such ordinary things as keeping her grass cut.

Some children rode by on bicycles as the two

women stood on the little front porch and knocked on the door.

The door was opened at last by Mrs. Corini's servant, a sly-eyed young woman with untidy hair. She seemed to fit perfectly with the small, dim entryway decorated with a dusty fern.

She led them silently along a narrow hall.

"She never speaks," Emily whispered to Joan. "I don't think she can."

Joan was sure the woman could speak very well. Very well, indeed. Well enough to imitate a man's voice or a woman's voice, or even the voice of a small child who had died when she was only twelve years old.

But again, Joan didn't argue.

When they came to the end of the hall, there was Mrs. Corini herself in a back parlor. She wore a long black robe and several large rings. Her hair was drawn back into a coil at the nape of her neck. Her eyes were extremely large and seemed to be looking at mysteries of life (and death) that no one else could see.

"This is my cousin, Joan Marshall," Emily said to Mrs. Corini. Cousin Emily was wearing her best blue dress for the great occasion of coming to Mrs. Corini's. Her face was bright with pleasure.

Mrs. Corini took Joan's hand in hers.

"So glad to meet you, dear," she said in a low, hushed voice.

There was a bare, round table in the center of the room. There were three chairs drawn up to the table. There was no other furniture. Mrs. Corini and Joan and Emily sat down at the table.

"Take hands," Mrs. Corini directed in her low voice.

It was time for the séance to begin.

Slowly, the servant drew the heavy curtains across the windows. The room was almost completely dark then. Only a faint light came from the hall. The servant girl crossed the room and stood in the doorway a moment, outlined by the pale daylight in the hall beyond. Then she closed the door and was gone. The room was completely dark. Black as night. Joan and Cousin Emily were alone with Mrs. Corini—and whoever might come from the dead to speak to them.

The room was silent.

It was silent for a long time.

Joan sat with her hands upon the table, one hand holding Emily's hand, one hand holding Mrs. Corini's hand. On the table their clasped hands held them together in the darkness.

At last Mrs. Corini spoke.

"Spirits of the Beyond...Spirits of the Beyond...Spirits of the Beyond..."

Then everything was silent again.

"We are calling a child...is a child there..."

There was no reply from the dead, and Mrs.

Corini spoke again. "...is a child there...speak to us...someone is waiting to hear...your dear sister Joan is waiting to hear...is a child there..."

A cloudy light, like a wisp of fog, spread across one corner of the darkened room.

An easy trick, Joan thought. The servant was in the room above. There was probably a tiny hole in the floor there, and she could shine a light through it to the séance room below. She could also speak through that tiny hole.

Joan waited to see what would happen next.

"Is a child there...speak to us..." Mrs. Corini's voice sank deeper.

And at last an answer came, floating softly through the room as though carried by the misty light.

"I am here. I am here, Joan."

Joan felt Cousin Emily's hand tighten, trembling to hear a voice from the dead.

"Amy? Amy, is that really you?" Joan's voice rose in the darkness.

"Yes, Amy. Your sister Amy. Don't you know me, Joan?"

The voice hovered close above Joan's head. Soft, sweet, sad. Whispering through the hazy light.

"I've missed you..." Joan hunted for words. She had never before talked to a voice from the dead.

"And I miss you, Joan. I didn't want to leave you."

There was something like a sob in the hovering voice.

"You were so young," Joan said.

"I didn't want to leave you. I wanted to come back."

"I understand," Joan answered. "I understand, Amy."

"I didn't want to leave you."

The voice was growing fainter, drifting away.

"I wanted to come back."

The voice faded. The room was silent.

"Amy—Amy?" Joan called after the vanished voice. But no little voice answered her. The misty light was gone. The room was dark again.

In the silence, Mrs. Corini spoke. Her voice was low and melancholy.

"The child is gone. It is that way with children. They do not speak to us for long. She has spoken to you, and now she has gone back to the world of the Spirits."

The séance was over.

Emily opened the curtains. As the light came in, Joan could see Mrs. Corini resting her head back against her chair, her great eyes closed in some silent meditation of her own.

She lifted one hand feebly to show that Joan and Emily should leave.

The sly-eyed servant was waiting down the hall to let them out.

As they went down the porch steps, Joan glanced at Cousin Emily. Emily's face was flushed with embarrassment. But she didn't say anything until they reached the car. Then, as she opened her purse and fumbled for her car keys, she said, "I'm so ashamed, Joan. I just don't know what to say."

Joan put her hand on her cousin's arm. "You don't have to say anything."

Emily shook her head. "James tried to tell me...he talked and talked, but I wouldn't listen."

Then she looked up at Joan with admiration.

"James told me a hundred times Mrs. Corini was a fake. But you proved it with just one word."

How had Joan proved that Mrs. Corini was a fake—and proved it with just one word?

The solution is on page 54.

The Perfect Murder

Mr. Sneed was a thin, mean little man.

He didn't like cats or dogs or children—or dessert for dinner. All those good things that most people like a lot.

He did like cigars; but he was too stingy to buy good cigars. His office had the stale smell of cheap cigar smoke. The sign on his door said:

J. SNEED
REAL ESTATE

The J. stood for Jeremy.

What Mr. Sneed liked most of all was money. Not to spend. Just to have. He was always trying to think of ways to have more money. And one day a wonderful opportunity walked into his office.

The wonderful opportunity was named Mr. Baker. Mr. Baker lived in a house on Willow Road, out of town about two miles. Mr. Baker loved the house. His wife loved the house. His children loved the house. But Mr. Baker was being transferred to California. He would have to sell the splendid old house.

As Mr. Sneed listened to Mr. Baker, his mind was racing. Mr. Baker would want to sell the house as fast as possible. Mr. Sneed would offer a low price, buy the house quickly, and sell it at his leisure for a large profit. What a wonderful opportunity!

Mr. Sneed made Mr. Baker a small offer for the house.

Very small.

Mr. Baker laughed. "You must be joking," he said. "The house is worth twice that amount."

Mr. Sneed puffed on his horrible cigar. "Just joking," he agreed. He tried to look like a jolly fellow who was full of jokes.

"Yes, yes," Mr. Baker slapped his knee and laughed again about Mr. Sneed's little joke. He was very amused. Finally he became serious again.

"Let's be serious now, Mr. Sneed," he said. "I would like you to handle the sale of the house for me. I have to leave for California next week. I'll keep in touch with you from California."

Mr. Sneed nodded. He said that would be fine. He was annoyed that Mr. Baker had laughed at his offer to buy the house, but he agreed to be Mr. Baker's real estate agent. People did sometimes have to leave a house before it was sold. The house was locked up tight, and the real estate agent had the key. He could take people to see the house. And by and by somebody would buy it.

But Mr. Sneed did not want "somebody" to buy the house on Willow Road.

He wanted to buy it himself—at his own small price.

When Mr. Baker left the office, Mr. Sneed sat back in his chair, lit another smelly cigar, and began to think.

People would start to come to look at the house on Willow Road. It was a good house. The price Mr. Baker wanted was fair. The house could be sold easily at Mr. Baker's price, Mr. Sneed was sure.

Unless...

Mr. Sneed puffed on his cigar, wreathing himself in blue smoke.

Unless...unless what? What would keep someone from buying a house?

Mr. Sneed thought about that a long time.

Finally he came up with an idea.

No one would want to buy a house where there had been a murder.

Once Mr. Sneed had figured this out, the rest was simple. All he had to do was make up a murder, tell it to the people who came to see the house, and no one would want to buy the house. By and by, Mr. Baker would have to sell it to Mr. Sneed—at Mr. Sneed's small price.

Cigar smoke billowed as Mr. Sneed puffed and thought.

He made up a dark windy night.

He made up two unsuspecting women.

He made up the perfect murder for the house on Willow Road.

The first people who came to look at the house were a young couple. It was a sunny October day. Leaves were golden and red on the trees in the woods along Willow Road. Everything was beautiful, until Mr. Sneed told the couple about the murder.

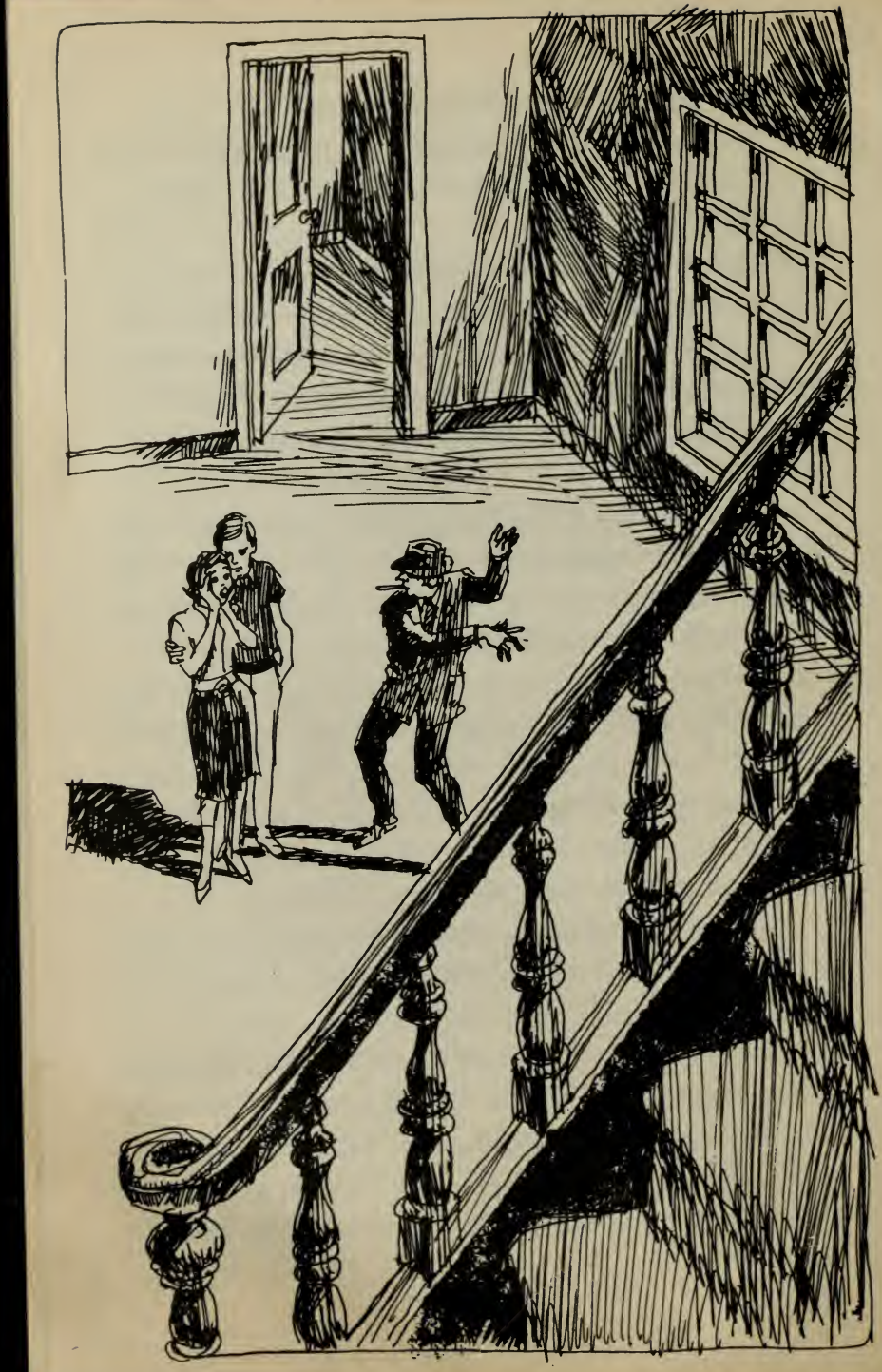
"That's why no one stays here very long," Mr. Sneed said regretfully. "The last owner, Mr. Baker—he was only here a year. People come and go so fast, dust can't settle on the furniture."

The husband and wife looked dismayed. The house was a fine old house. The woods around were blazing with autumn glory. But murder...well, that was something else entirely.

"How did it happen?" the husband asked, leaning closer to Mr. Sneed.

Mr. Sneed began his story slowly and carefully. He had made it all up by himself, and he was rather proud of it.

"A few years ago there was a Mrs. Belmont living here. She lived alone, except for her housekeeper. One night the housekeeper was wakened by wind banging the shutters. She got out of bed to close the shutters—and she heard a scream."



The wife shivered. The husband put his arm around her comfortingly. They didn't hear tales of murder every day.

Mr. Sneed continued. It was his story, he had made it up himself, and he told it well.

"The scream rang through the whole house. Oh, it was dreadful. The housekeeper was too frightened to move at first. Then everything was quiet, and she ran to Mrs. Belmont's room. There was poor Mrs. Belmont, dead as a doornail, lying in a pool of blood."

Mr. Sneed didn't have to go further with his story. The couple excused themselves politely. They said they would think about the house, but Mr. Sneed knew they wouldn't.

The next people who came to look at the house said the same.

"Thank you, Mr. Sneed—we'll let you know."

The third couple, who had three little children, weren't even that polite. They said right out they didn't want to live in a house where a murder had been committed. All those pools of blood...no, it wasn't the house for them at all.

Mr. Sneed rubbed his thin fingers together, puffed on his stinky cigar and said, "Yes, I quite agree."

Autumn was passing. The trees on Willow Road changed from gold to brown. They fluttered from their branches, and the wind blew them in

gusts across the ground. Soon it would be winter.

In late November, Mr. Baker called Mr. Sneed. He called all the way from California, to see how things were going with his nice house.

"Not very well," Mr. Sneed said in a mournful tone. "Not well at all."

Mr. Baker sighed. Winter was coming, and he knew that winter was not the best time to sell a house. People would be Christmas shopping. Snow would fall. Cold, icy winds would blow. Nobody would be out looking for a house to buy until the first warm days of spring.

"I want to sell that house before winter sets in," Mr. Baker said.

"Yes, of course, I understand," Mr. Sneed purred over the phone. He could sound warm and friendly when he put his mind to it.

"I can't understand why it hasn't sold," Mr. Baker complained. "It's a good, sturdy, roomy house in a beautiful woods."

"Perhaps that's the problem," Mr. Sneed suggested gently. "People are leery of deserted country areas. They'd rather live in town."

"Nonsense," Mr. Baker objected. "Lots of people love houses in the country."

Mr. Sneed paused a moment. Then he said softly, "My offer still holds, Mr. Baker."

"Your offer was ridiculous," Mr. Baker said sharply. "Forget it, Sneed."

But Mr. Sneed wasn't going to forget it. When he hung up the phone he leaned back in his chair with a look of satisfaction on his thin, mean face. Mr. Baker wanted to sell his house before winter set in, and winter was only a few weeks away. What could happen in a few weeks? Nothing, Mr. Sneed was sure. No one would buy the house, and at last Mr. Baker would give in.

Mr. and Mrs. Darley came to the Sneed Real Estate Office just three days later. There was a nip of winter in the air. Mr. Sneed was counting the days, hoping for a heavy snowfall soon, and he was not happy to see Mr. and Mrs. Darley.

But his "perfect murder" had scared everybody else away, so he assured himself he had nothing to worry about.

Mrs. Darley was a small woman with bright blue eyes. She wore a warm hat and warm gloves. The short, gray November afternoons were cold on Willow Road.

Mr. Darley was a kindly-looking man. No doubt he loved cats and dogs and children—and dessert for dinner. And he loved the house on Willow Road.

Mrs. Darley loved the house too. When they had been through it from cellar to attic, she was sure it was just the house they had been looking for. As they left by the front steps, with all the bare woods and the warning of winter around them, she said, "I'm surprised this house wasn't

sold long ago. It's a wonderful house."

So then Mr. Sneed told his story.

Wild winds banged the shutters and woke the housekeeper...The scream rang out through the house. Poor, dead Mrs. Belmont was discovered.

Usually when Mr. Sneed got to the part about the pools of blood, nobody wanted to hear anymore. But on this bleak November afternoon, Mrs. Darley gazed at Mr. Sneed with astonished eyes and said:

"What happened next?"

Mr. Sneed shook his head sadly. "The housekeeper tried to rouse Mrs. Belmont, but it was too late. Mrs. Belmont was quite dead. The housekeeper heard a noise below, like the closing of a door. She went to the window, but there was fog all around the house, so she couldn't see anything. The murderer escaped without a trace."

"Why was she murdered?" Mr. Darley asked curiously. "What was the motive?"

"Ah, that's just the point," Mr. Sneed said with cunning. "There was no motive. Mrs. Belmont had no enemies. And it wasn't a robbery-murder; nothing was taken from the house."

"Is that so?" Mr. Darley murmured. "That is a puzzle, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed." Mr. Sneed nodded. "Indeed, a puzzle. The whole town was mystified. Some

people think it could happen again—a desolate, lonely house in the woods..."

Mr. Sneed let his voice drift away on this ominous note of warning.

He was sure he had said enough to send the Darleys on their way. Out of his life forever.

Mr. and Mrs. Darley had loved the house. It had wide bay windows overlooking the garden. It had a fireplace in the living room. It had a sweeping staircase and a large kitchen.

It had everything they wanted.

"I think we should buy that house," Mrs. Darley said as her husband drove back toward town.

"You wouldn't mind living in a house where there was a murder?" Mr. Darley was surprised.

Mrs. Darley gazed out across the stark near-winter landscape. Bare tree branches spread out against a leaden sky. A crow rose from the woods and flew off into the darkening afternoon.

"I don't think there ever was a murder there," she said. She turned and smiled at her husband. "I think Mr. Sneed made the whole thing up. I'm not sure why. Maybe we'll never know why. But he made it up."

How did Mrs. Darley know Mr. Sneed had made up the story of the murder?

The solution is on page 54.

The Magic Word

All the members of the Royal Street Rangers were gathered in the clubhouse one warm June morning.

The clubhouse was an old shed in Marty's back yard on Royal Street.

Branches of a large apple tree shaded the roof. Marty's father had let the boys paint "ROYAL STREET RANGERS" on the door.

"Meeting will come to order." Gordy rapped his knuckles on an old table his mother had donated to the clubhouse.

"Meeting will come to order," Ike mimicked.

Al snickered and kicked Ike under the table.

The meeting was off to its usual not-very-serious start.

The shed in Marty's yard wasn't very big. But neither was the club. There were only four members. Marty, Al, Gordy, and Ike.

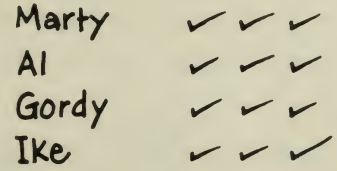
The first business of each meeting was always to collect dues.

Every Saturday, each boy brought fifty cents.

ROYAL
STREET
RANGERS

Gordy kept a record of dues in a little blue notebook, making a check mark by each boy's name every week.

The club had only been meeting since summer vacation started. There weren't very many check marks yet.



Their plan was to save the dues money all summer and spend it at the Labor Day carnival, which came to town at the end of summer. Paying dues every week was a good way to save for carnival rides and carnival hot dogs.

Sometimes, after the dues were collected, there wasn't much other business. Sometimes there wasn't any other business at all. Then the meeting was over pretty fast, and the boys could get right on with their plans for the day. They fished at Blue Creek. Or swam in the park pool. Or had bicycle races at the deserted school playground. Once they had pitched a tent and slept overnight in Al's back yard.

But on this particular Saturday morning, there was important business to attend to. Ike wanted

Charlie Anderson to join the Royal Street Rangers, and the boys were going to vote on it.

"And we have to decide on our secret password," Gordy reminded everybody. He was always businesslike.

"Let's vote on Charlie first," Ike said. He was eager to have Charlie join the club.

"Let's have a secret vote," Marty suggested. He thought secret votes were more fun than just raising hands.

"Aw, who needs all that fuss," Al objected. His freckles were as bright as his red hair, and he liked to do things quick and simple. "Let's just say yes or no."

"Secret vote! Secret vote!" Marty chanted. It was his shed. He ought to have some rights.

Gordy rapped on the table for order.

"We could take a vote on how to vote," Ike joked.

Al gave him another kick under the table.

"Come on, you guys. Stop fooling around." Marty wanted to have his secret vote. Then they could ride their bikes to the park pool. It was a hot day, just right for swimming. All their bikes were propped outside against the shed by the door that said ROYAL STREET RANGERS.

"All those in favor of Charlie Anderson raise your hands," Gordy said. He was president.

Marty gave in with a shrug. Secret votes were better, but he was outnumbered.

Every boy raised his hand.

"Okay—let's go swimming." Al pushed back his chair. He never liked to sit still too long.

Gordy was writing Charlie's name in his notebook. At the next meeting he would make a check by Charlie's name, when Charlie paid his dues.

"We haven't decided on our secret password," Marty spoke up. Maybe they could have a secret vote on that.

Gordy looked up with a grin. "We don't have to worry about our password. Now that Charlie's a member of the Rangers, we've got our password!"

What did Gordy mean?

The solution is on page 55.

Arrest This Man!

The young man said a hundred and fifty dollars was "a fair price for a *small* porch."

He said he had never seen the lady before, but if he hadn't been to her house he wouldn't have known whether the front porch was large or small.

The Haunted House

When Bob came home, both girls were in the kitchen, still wearing their coats. They were being scolded for getting home late, and Bob might have supposed they had been together.

But when Jill told him about the "mysterious voice," Bob said "*she*" probably made it up. By *she*, Bob meant Francie.

Only because he was there, hiding behind the bushes, did he know that it was Francie who had been walking home alone past the Haunted House.

At Gunpoint

Mr. Fairchild had notified the police.

When Mr. Purdy mentioned the "*Chopin*" concert on the telephone, Mr. Fairchild knew something was wrong.

Chopin wrote mainly piano music, not violin pieces.

Mr. Fairchild called the police and they came with him to the store, waiting in the hall until Joe Ferret's attention was distracted by the open safe.

Mr. Purdy, distressed as he was by a gun in his face, had thought quickly enough to give Mr. Fairchild a tip-off that something was wrong.

A Voice from the Dead

The word was "*Amy*"—which was not the name of Joan Marshall's sister.

Mrs. Corini knew that Joan wanted to speak to her dead sister, but she didn't know the sister's name.

When Joan said, "*Amy, is that really you?*" the servant (alias the voice from the dead) answered, "*Yes, Amy. Your sister Amy.*"

When Emily heard that, she knew Mrs. Corini was a fake.

Cousin Emily knew very well that Joan's sister's name was Laura.

The Perfect Murder

Mr. Sneed had said the housekeeper was wakened by the sound of shutters banging in a high wind...yet a few minutes later, she could not see the fleeing murderer because of the "*fog.*"

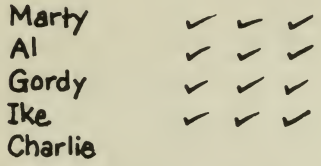
Fog is created by moist, motionless air. If there is a wind, it will blow away the fog. There could not be fog on a night with a wind strong enough to bang the heavy wooden shutters at the windows of a house.

Mr. and Mrs. Darley bought Mr. Baker's house at a price satisfactory to everyone.

Mr. Sneed lit a smelly cigar, sat down at his desk, and tried to figure out where his plan had gone wrong.

The Magic Word

When Gordy added Charlie's name to the membership list in his notebook, the list looked like this:



Gordy saw that the initials of the members spelled *"MAGIC."*

There was the secret password. A very special password for the Royal Street Rangers.

Solve It Yourself

Magic Word Mysteries

One word can be very important — as you'll see in this collection of baffling mysteries.

Is there truly a supernatural presence in the *Haunted House?* Can a mysterious woman summon *A Voice from the Dead?* And will a man held *At Gunpoint,* outwit a clever jewel thief? The answers to these questions can be found in *just one word!* Read these stories carefully and find the single clue to solve these

Magic Word Myst

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